

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sadao Okamura

Sadao Okamura was born August 21, 1925 in Pepe'ekeo, on the Big Island. His father, an immigrant from Japan, worked on the sugar plantation and his mother sewed clothes for the plantation workers.

He grew up in a family of nine children and attended Pepe'ekeo Elementary School. When the war broke out, his schooling at Hilo High School was interrupted. He then chose to go to Hilo Vocational School in 1942.

In 1943, he moved to Honolulu and worked at Punahou School as a welder apprentice for the U.S. Engineer Department (USED). After the war ended, he was inducted into the army and was shipped to Christmas Island, where he worked as a journeyman.

After his discharge from the army, he worked in the private sector for four years, and from 1950–1973 he was a civil service worker at Hickam Air Force Base. From 1980 to 1990 he worked as a maintenance mechanic for Sheraton-Waikīkī Hotel. During that time, he also earned two associate degrees from Honolulu Community College.

He is married and has one daughter.

Tape No. 22-16-1-92

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sadao Okamura (SO)

March 6, 1992

'Aiea, O'ahu

BY: Joe Rossi (JR)

JR: This is an interview with Sadao Okamura on March 6, 1992, in his 'Aiea home. The interviewer is Joe Rossi.

Mr. Okamura, to begin with, could you tell me a little about your parents and where they're from?

SO: My parents came from Japan. They born in Japan. They came here. . . . Oh, my mother's parents was here. They had a cane field, raising cane. They had twenty-one acres of cane land to raise and harvest.

JR: Where?

SO: At Pepe'ekeo, Big Island. That's going to be Andrade Camp. Mill camp, anyway, [in] Pepe'ekeo. Let's see, my father was working in Volcano area, and he find out something about my mother. Yeah, so he asked the parents—that's my grandfather—asked if she can be married to him. So that's how they got married.

JR: Do you know what year they got married?

SO: Gee, kind of hard, yeah?

JR: Yeah, long time, no?

SO: Yeah, you got to go back, all the way back, I guess.

JR: Do you know what part of Japan they came from?

SO: Yeah, Hiroshima. My father came from Sakotani Village. And my mother came from part of Hiroshima. It's a certain part of a farm country in Hiroshima. But my father's place is kind of way up in the mountain valley. They raise rice.

JR: So they were like farmers.

SO: Farmers, yeah. He went to school over there, I guess. I don't know what age he came to Hawai'i.

JR: What were their names, your mom and dad?

SO: My father's name was Kengo, Kengo Okamura. My mother's name was Mitsue Okinaka.

JR: And when were you born?

SO: I was born twenty-first of August, 1925. I am the fifth son. One, two, three, four, five—fifth son. And below me get one sister and then get twin brothers and another sister. And so going to be nine all together. Looks like I'm in the middle.

JR: Where were you born?

SO: I was born in Pepe'ekeo—Pepe'ekeo Hospital, yeah. I don't know how much I weighed. In those days, different.

JR: Do you know what your parents were doing for work when you were born?

SO: Well, he was a laborer, you know, working the cane field. He was working with the mule—mule or donkeys. He would take portable flumes for water. After cutting canes, they put the thing in the plow. On a hill, so that the water brings down that [cane] to the mill, near the ocean. That's where the mill have in Pepe'ekeo. He used to pack that donkey with that cane flume, portable cane flume. The carpenters put that up portable, so you have to let the thing down certain place in the cane field after they cut. After they put the flume, the workers who cut the cane pile it up next to the flume. So whoever works lay the cane—that's about, maybe six feet long or five feet long, in a bundle. Weighs about, depend on yourself, eighty pound to less. You can make it lighter or make it heavy for you can carry that. So it's going to be easier for you or be hard for you. Whatever you can cut the cane, well, you get paid that way, the weight of the cane, whatever you cut.

JR: Hard work.

SO: Hard work. Well, any kind of work is hard.

JR: (Laughs) What about your mother? Did she have to work too?

SO: Well, she had a grocery store, a small store with tailor shop or clothing store. She can make clothes for the plantation workers.

JR: Like a seamstress or something like that.

SO: Yeah, so she can make work clothes, like jacket, the pants, you know. So that's how she make a living too, to help out the family.

JR: Did she do that out of the home or did she have a regular . . .

- SO: Right in the home, where she sell it. She can sell can goods or vegetables, whatever get inside—potato, onions.
- JR: Was that a separate room in your house that was set up like the store?
- SO: Well, the store and the sewing class was about same, so she watch both side. Yeah, she can watch the side. Previously, early part we had meat market, 'cause the previous owner, they left for Japan, so the owner told her to take it over. They don't have to pay it all one time, but pay as you go, monthly. If you make enough money, pay then. I mean, send them money in Japan. There was no [written] agreement anyway. The agreement was only to take over the store. Something like that. I'm not sure about it but.
- JR: So she---one part was selling the groceries or canned goods and stuff.
- SO: Right, right.
- JR: And the other part was the sewing.
- SO: Sewing, plus the next section was the meat market.
- JR: And this was right next to your house? Or your house was . . .
- SO: Well, all built right inside the house. I was maybe about nine years old. Previous to that we used to live in a camp. We get house of our own.
- JR: What kind of house was that?
- SO: Well, regular living quarters, yeah? Get three bedrooms. Only thing, the rest room was outside.
- JR: So there was nine kids in the family.
- SO: Yeah.
- JR: And you had three bedrooms. So how did. . . . All the boys take one bedroom, the girls take the other?
- SO: Well, one bedroom was large enough, big enough so you take all the small children. Yeah, not too bad. Everybody shared with each other, so we can sleep on the parlor or something like that.
- JR: Then they got the other—when you were nine, you moved to the other place.
- SO: Yeah, we had to move to the store. Further up, maybe about quarter mile—less than one-eighth mile away, 200 yards away. That's where they had river. The river flows, river was flowing down, right next to the—we had that store over there, so we can raise chicken, we can raise duck.

JR: Oh yeah?

SO: Yeah. The duck need water, see? We had plenty banana trees, bananas and mountain apples. Next door you get sugarcane, so you don't have to worry about that. (Chuckles) We used to get that guava trees up in the river, up in the mountains. We used to get some old wood where we can burn to make hot water. You know, for heat up, burn, so the water get hot so you can take a bath. Like a hot tub or something.

JR: Like a *furo*.

SO: *Furo*, yeah. So we got to get. We used to help the mother make fire, wood for wash clothes. Big galvanized tub, so she can cook all the clothes. You know, when you work in the cane field, we all mud, all mud. Even the shoes don't last long with mud like that. Expensive, eh? Well, in those days to you expensive was—you know, you only get ten cents an hour. And when I start working I was thirteen years old, ten cents a day.

JR: What were you doing for ten cents a day?

SO: Cutting grass, *hō hana* we call that—weed between the cane stalks. So you get one row—either you take one row, or you get partner. Take half and the other person take half. And the cane growing like this, cane stalk, so you cut half, put about one feet and pile up in the center. If your partner is slow, you go back, help him out. You go back that way and then come back again. They had fifteen or ten minutes break in the morning. When we started 6:00, maybe you get 9:45 to 10:00. Then we get lunch at twelve or before twelve, half an hour. And then you go back to work again. And then you got to go get through at about 4:00 in the afternoon.

JR: Yeah, long day.

SO: Long day.

JR: That was during the summer you did that or weekends or what?

SO: Well, before you go---yeah, during the summer. During the summer, yeah.

JR: Was that expected of you?

SO: Oh yeah, unless you get something else. If you don't have anything, you should work for the plantation, work in the cane field during the summer. That's how we can do, unless you stay home, raise your own. If you get rabbits or what, you know. But you not going take all your day [to] raise pig, raise your chicken. That's morning and night, that's all. Only feed, or you got to clean the pan or something.

JR: Did you have lots of chores at home?

SO: Well, get area, so we can make small building for the chicken coop or something like that.

JR: What kind of school were you going to, elementary school?

SO: Elementary school at Pepe'ekeo. Pepe'ekeo Elementary School, I guess. We stayed until ninth grade anyway.

JR: You walked to school?

SO: Walked to school. That's about three, four mile, morning and night. Other people get further up camps, so they walking about eight miles, yeah. That's kind of far.

JR: So did your mother make all your clothes?

SO: Yes, all for the family. We walk barefoot, see, so our skin was tough. We can run. We can run on the coral even.

JR: Oh yeah?

SO: Yeah. Even get big pebbles, nothing to it. We can just run.

JR: Did it stay tough like that or did it get soft later when you started wearing shoes?

SO: Well, after that was, when you start going high school, maybe you got to wear shoes or something, sandals or what.

JR: Can you remember the first time you had to wear shoes?

SO: Oh yeah, graduation. Ninth-grade graduation I had to buy shoes. Oh boy, I had the hardest time.

JR: What kind of shoes? Were they like black?

SO: Yeah, black, black. I still get my graduation pants, yet.

(Laughter)

SO: Don't fit my waist now, but then the length same, yeah.

JR: Your mother made the pants?

SO: Yeah, my mother made that.

JR: What did it feel like when you had to put on shoes?

SO: Oh, uncomfortable, very uncomfortable. You not used to that. That's how that thing goes, you know. So next September, what, I went to Hilo High School. I was a sophomore. Everything was going smooth until December 7, [1941].

JR: Yeah.

SO: Yeah. After that December, I don't know, they cut us off. No gasoline or what, they stop that

thing—the buses—so we cannot go school.

JR: Do you remember what happened on the seventh, what you were doing that day?

SO: No, natural. We didn't hear until next morning or that night, the radio.

JR: Yeah?

SO: Yeah, because this is Big Island and not O'ahu, not Honolulu.

JR: So you didn't know that . . .

SO: We didn't know that thing was, war break out or any kind of bomb was done on Pearl Harbor.

JR: Had you heard anything before that, that maybe there would be a war?

SO: No, nothing, nothing. We don't know anything about that.

JR: So you heard over the radio?

SO: Radio, yeah. It's the radio.

JR: Do you remember what the reaction was of people when they heard?

SO: Well, you know, we just got to be careful, that's all. To be Japanese Americans, you know, we get lot of commotion. "You a Jap." That was bad.

JR: Was your father an American citizen then?

SO: No, no. He was a Japanese citizen, as my mother too. She lost her papers, that's why. She was American citizen, but she don't know where she put that paper. So she had to go back as Japanese national. She went to fourth grade English school. She say she went, but she don't know. She forgot where she put the paper, so cannot prove that she's citizen. Well, cannot do nothing about it. So after that, maybe about June 1942, then I started to go to Hilo Vocational School. The bus, I guess, started to run before then, because—I don't know if February or March we start going to district school. Only the hours [were reduced], so we get half a day school.

JR: So starting in February or March you had half day of school?

SO: Yeah, that's high school.

JR: You didn't go to Hilo High then?

SO: We couldn't go to Hilo because of gas shortage. They stopped doing that.

JR: So they set up some other kind of school?

- SO: Yeah, little near place, I guess. So they district the thing to three section. Get Pepe'ekeo, Honomū, and Hakalau. We going to Honomū, that the center. So the people from both side, they come to Honomū. We had classes over there.
- JR: It was only half day of school.
- SO: Yeah, because you get English, social studies, and math. Three classes, so that's all can take inside there. Not enough teachers. The teachers were so many, that's all, and so many student.
- JR: What classes were they missing then?
- SO: Well, whatever get—the vocational, carpenter shop, phys-ed [physical education] or something like that. Maybe had, but too small the yard was, so we couldn't run around, play ball—basketball or what. So I don't know what else had. Maybe get study period or what. Well, we used to come home after lunch anyway.
- JR: So you went mornings.
- SO: In the morning, and then came back. But I don't know if---can't remember already, if that was two hours, two hours, or what. But before twelve, I think, we had to wait for the bus already to come pick us up.
- JR: You remember what kind of building?
- SO: Well, wooden building, regular class.
- JR: Was it the same teachers as before or different teachers?
- SO: No, different teachers. They live in this section of the country or town. They came to this school. So they combined the junior or sophomore, or junior and seniors. Something like that. They made the class stay in the same room. Something like that. Forgetting most of these things, it's too far gone.
- JR: Do you recall what you were doing for that month or two when there was no school, from like December and January?
- SO: Oh, we had to work in the plantation. We go back and go work in the cane field again. Can't do nothing staying home.
- JR: Were most of the families in that area Japanese?
- SO: Japanese. You had Filipinos, you had one Chinese family, and had Portuguese family. Not that much in our place but. Our camp had mostly Japanese, yeah.
- JR: Can you remember any animosity, you know, against Japanese because of the Pearl Harbor?
- SO: Oh, when we went to town, like Hilo—shopping or vocational school I was going—certain

people, Portuguese people, they would yell.

JR: Yell, like. . . .

SO: "You're a Jap." Well, if we keep our mouth shut, that's all we can do, nothing. One incident inside when I was working in the vocational school. Certain people, they don't like it. I would figure maybe get professional jealousy or what. Regardless if he's older or what, he cannot absorb what he's trying to do. You explain to him, but still cannot understand, so he get mad. He get mad, and he's calling names again.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

SO: I stay away. I stayed away, do my own things. So after that, I didn't want to go teacher or anybody. I just stayed [by] myself. Or whatever working student I get, if I get along, then we help each other.

JR: Do you think that folks avoided going into town because of that kind of thing?

SO: Oh yeah. We had curfew that's why, too.

JR: Had what?

SO: Curfew. At night, what, eight o'clock or seven o'clock, we cannot be out on the road. After that, they release that thing—get headlamp, get quarter-inch wide, only two inch the light shine, that's all. I don't know if you remember that. Then we got to paint 'em black or, you know, dark. So only that quarter inch and then two inch on the headlight. You get the shade on there. So she won't reflect up, she would hit only the bottom. Then you can drive.

JR: Did you guys have a car?

SO: No, later part, after that. I don't know if my brother had the car or what.

JR: You know, your dad being from Japan and your mom, was there any fear that they might get interned or anything like that?

SO: Yeah, yeah. They was figuring that. Plus, the money part. Whatever she made at the store, if she get extra cash or what, cannot go to the bank. What she bought? She bought washing machine, piano. Just to get the cash away.

JR: She didn't want to have a lot of . . .

SO: Yeah, she didn't want to have cash on top. [After January 1942, no person was allowed to hold more than \$200 cash and no business could hold more than \$500 except to meet payrolls.] Well, no can help. But she got to get cash to buy material. Either that or she wrote letter, I think, to the person at the store. I don't know how they was paying, by credit or what. Need to get material, yeah. That's only my thinking. I'm not sure if that thing was done that way.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JR: You were telling me about your parents and being afraid that they might be interned.

SO: Oh yeah. But so far, nothing happened. It was all right. We stayed together. The family all stayed together.

JR: Did you know of anybody in the area that had been taken away or anything like that?

SO: Well, the Japanese[-language] school principal went. And the reverend. One of the reverends went over there.

JR: Did people know what happened to them or where they went or anything like that?

SO: No. After that, when they came back, then we found out where they went. We didn't know anything about it.

JR: Were you going to Japanese[-language] school at the time?

SO: Well, I was going high school already. I was going Hilo.

JR: Oh, so that was when you were younger then.

SO: Yeah, when I was younger. When I was ninth grade we had to go Japanese school three o'clock, four thirty, five o'clock. Sometimes you come back five o'clock in the evening. Sometimes winter time it's dark already, almost five o'clock, yeah. Some people going above us, our camp, go Maukaloa Camp, is farther away. So it's pretty dark already. You got to put light.

JR: Walking, yeah?

SO: Yeah, walking. Can walk, you know, you can see the sky like that, but in the homes, get one light already when we reach home after school. No buses, you know, unless you get car. Everybody used to walk home.

JR: Rain, whatever.

SO: Rain, you get umbrella or raincoat. Barefoot.

JR: When you starting high school, was there any idea what you wanted to do when you got older, finished high school? Did you have any idea what?

SO: No. After I went to go vocational school, I didn't know yet what I wanted to be, yeah. Vocational school, my mother wanted me to be electrician. But to me, I figure maybe plumbing. So I took sheet metal and plumbing at vocational school. And they had welding in between, so I finished my two-year course. We had 2,000 hours we had to complete before we get certificate.

- JR: So how did you get from going to Hilo High to going to the vocational school?
- SO: Came in the newspaper or something, that anybody who wants to go to trade school, the bus is running already. So I figured, might as well try. So I asked my parents if I can go to the trade school instead of high school. This is how I went to the trade school to learn one trade.
- JR: Was there many people your age doing that at that time?
- SO: No, was only myself.
- JR: Oh yeah?
- SO: Yeah.
- JR: You were the youngest one there?
- SO: Yeah, going to that trade school.
- JR: Oh yeah?
- SO: Yeah, after that maybe somebody followed me, I think. One carpenter or. . . Couple of boys, they went to the trade school. I don't know if they graduated or what. And they went to trade school.
- JR: So nobody from the school, you know, the high school, said, "Oh, you got to finish this first before you can go trade school."
- SO: No, they didn't say anything about it. They just said to just drop out, that's all. They teaching only three [subjects], so they know you going get your three going to vocational school anyway. Every Saturday, we had related subjects.
- JR: You had what?
- SO: Related course.
- JR: Oh, oh.
- SO: You know, they had paper and pencil, books like that. Was in Hilo High School. So we spend another four hours, I think. Out of the whole month, maybe take five days for saying class work. Anything related to that or not related, but still get books. Learn about that—safety, what is proper tools, proper clothing. After graduation, then you look for your. . . . When you went to apprentice school, came over here again and took up welding. Welder, yeah? Oh, I should have gone to school some more. (Chuckles) But I get another 4,000 hours to go to be a welder.
- JR: Four thousand.
- SO: Four thousand hours.

- JR: So the vocational stuff---was a vocational school in Hilo that you went to six days a week then? Five days a week?
- SO: Well, five days, plus we used to work Saturday, I think, too.
- JR: Were you living in Hilo then?
- SO: No, no.
- JR: You were living at home?
- SO: Catch the bus, go back and forth in the bus.
- JR: Yeah, yeah.
- SO: Even then we have to go---the bus, I don't know if it went up or if it drop off and we got to walk back to the bus station. I forget.
- JR: How big of a school was that, the vocational school?
- SO: Oh, pretty big. Had mechanic shop, carpenter shop, sheet metal work, plumbing. Oh, I don't know had machine shop, too. I forgot already. Had quite a bit of student.
- JR: Yeah. How many you think?
- SO: Well, over a hundred I think, over a hundred.
- JR: How many teachers you think they had there?
- SO: Mechanic, machinist, carpenter, sheet metal, plumbing, and related schools, so lot of instructors. Had about five, five or six, with one secretary, one principal. Maybe more, I'm not sure. Wasn't too bad, yeah?
- JR: So, it was two years.
- SO: Two years for vocational school. So I came back, I applied for apprenticeship program in Honolulu, which was 1943.
- JR: Did you want to work in Honolulu, or did you try to find work in Hilo, could not find?
- SO: Well, yeah. Find work at Hilo, but you have to work in the plantation. The plantation, they need welders, mechanic, all that kind trade, but there's no opening.
- JR: No opening.
- SO: No opening. So the only thing you can do is come Honolulu, apply for job or apply for another trade.

- JR: Was a lot of people doing that at that time, coming to Honolulu from the Big Island?
- SO: Maybe, maybe. I'm not sure, but maybe. But I know I left, myself anyway.
- JR: How did you find out there was work here?
- SO: Well, USED—U.S. [Engineer] Department—they always need worker.
- JR: They were advertising?
- SO: They were advertising. They need apprentice, so I went to apply. Go to unemployment office in Hilo, they says, "You better go Honolulu." How they came, they caught the steamer or they had plane already. I don't know if had plane or steamer. I know when I first came here, I caught the steamer, the *Wai'ale'ale*. Since small ship, take overnight.
- JR: You came on your own?
- SO: Yeah, came on my own.
- JR: What kind of stuff did you bring with you?
- SO: Oh, just my clothes.
- JR: Suitcase?
- SO: Just my clothes in a small suitcase. Change of clothes, that's all. Whatever tools need, you figure you got to come over here and buy, yeah?
- JR: Did you have the job already before you came or you came to look?
- SO: No, came to look.
- JR: Did you know anybody here?
- SO: Yeah, I had one. My father's friend had [a place] in Honolulu. I stayed with them for about three months, I think. And then I went to a hotel, Nakamura Hotel was. They had rates, monthly rates.
- JR: Where was that Nakamura Hotel?
- SO: Beretania [Street] and River Street. Someplace on Beretania, right across the park, 'A'ala Park. So, stayed over there. And from there we used to go work to Punahou School, yeah.
- JR: What kind of people were staying in that hotel at that time, do you remember? Mostly workers?
- SO: Well, mostly Japanese, all working outside. Come from Kailua, they don't want to go home, so they stayed. One of them was Big Island, Kaua'i, and Maui. Had people from all over the

island.

JR: You had a room to yourself or you shared a room?

SO: Yeah, room to myself. The bath was public. Everybody go to the bath. Two-and-a-half years, I think, I took my 4,000 hours. We worked six days a week, too. And they counted all the hours and they gave me credit for vocational school. I got the hours for journeyman.

JR: So what was the job when you came over?

SO: Well, I was an apprentice welder.

JR: For the engineers.

SO: For USED, engineer department at Punahou School.

JR: At Punahou.

SO: Yeah.

JR: They took over all of Punahou, yeah?

SO: Oh yeah, they took over all of Punahou School.

JR: What did it look like at that time with them there?

SO: Oh, old building, that's all. Old building.

JR: So they were working all over.

SO: Well, get mostly military inside certain section, engineer section, I guess. So we had to maintain certain things in Punahou, plus different section.

JR: Did you have an area in Punahou that was the area that you worked in most of the time?

SO: Yeah, we had shop right on Nehoa Street. I don't know what building that is, but we had shop in there. We had welding shop, electric shop, and machine shop. And what else? I don't know if the carpenter shop was over there. I'm not sure. You know the race track right above our shop, where they run? That was the motor pool area.

JR: Oh yeah, for trucks and stuff?

SO: For the trucks, buses, and whatnot, yeah.

JR: Had you heard about Punahou School prior to coming and working there? You know, being the *Haole* private school, that kind of thing?

SO: No, no. Didn't know nothing about it. (Laughs) Didn't know nothing about that. The

dormitory, way more Waikīkī side, they made dorm plus cafeteria. So lunch hour, we used to go eat. For fifty cents, you can't go wrong. You had lunch, everything, soup to nuts.

(Laughter)

SO: Yeah, dinner too, same. Eat and go home. You don't have to—so long as you working, you can go inside the cafeteria, mess hall. That was a good deal.

JR: Was it pretty busy around there, lots of people working and stuff like that?

SO: Oh yeah, yeah.

JR: How many people were working in your shop?

SO: In our shop?

JR: Yeah, yeah.

SO: Oh, in our shop had about twelve, I think. Twelve, plus you still get some more—electric shop, machine shop. Yeah, so you get close to about eighty people maybe.

JR: Is that civilians?

SO: Civilian, yeah.

JR: Was there military then that was your boss or something?

SO: No, was civilian boss, yeah. Military maybe take over, but they was headquarter section. Our shop was right by the swimming pool, more on Nehoa side, Punchbowl. What you call that, Punahou Street? Next to that. I don't know what building that's supposed to be.

JR: Did you have much interaction with the military, you know, much contact with the military guys?

SO: No. We stayed---we worked right inside the shop, that's all. Some days when you had to make that stove, you know, that portable stove for the heater to make hot water for the chow line—when they demand, we had to work ten hours, you know, six days a week. Sometimes even Sunday, you had to catch up production.

JR: Do you remember any of the—you were making stoves, do you remember anything else that you made?

SO: Stoves, repair work, or make canopy. You know, quite a few get. Frames to be built. I don't know what kind frame, but they have dimension, small sketches. You just follow that.

JR: They just give you that stuff, and then you put it together?

SO: Yeah, put it together, weld it all up and make ready. You give to the paint shop or what. But

you just leave outside for finish. Finished section, we just leave that thing over there. Somebody come pick it up.

JR: Was there enough supplies, you know, enough of the metal and stuff to make all this?

SO: Yeah, we always have enough material. They tell you what size to use already. You just pick up whatever material get. Or if you don't have, you ask the supervisor what substitution you want and substitute material, that's all. That's about all you can do.

JR: Did it seem like you guys were rushed a lot of the time, there was a big rush to get the stuff done?

SO: No, no. We work steady, that's all. The foreman says, "Just work steady, that's all." He didn't push too much. Of course, he was all right.

JR: Most of the guys you were working with, were they also local guys?

SO: Local, yeah. My foreman come from Minneapolis or what, cold country. He had a photographer studio. But he was a welder up in the Mainland, so he took over the shop. He was our foreman. I try help him out or lend as much as I can. Was all right, just don't be goofing off, that's all. Make sure that you finish your job. You finish your job, come ask for more. That's what I did, that's all. (Chuckles)

JR: I'm going to stop just to turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JR: Did you make many friends when you were doing that kind of work?

SO: With the customer or with the . . .

JR: No, no, no, with the guys you worked with.

SO: Oh, yeah. We have to help each other. Otherwise, when we need help to move—you cannot carry your own self, so we got to help one another. When you ask for help, you got to go help him. Otherwise, the big thing, how you going to carry it yourself? The forklift cannot come inside the shop where you working. Where you want to cut with the torch, if you cut that thing small for you carry, going be too short for you. Otherwise, you going be sorry man if you don't help, when you need help.

JR: What did you do in your free time?

SO: Free time? Oh, free time you got to go sleep. Or else you don't have enough sleep.

JR: You must have had some time off or something like that.

SO: Oh yeah, yeah. We supposed to be---curfew was eight o'clock, and then they moved that thing to ten o'clock. You know, those days, wartime. I don't know when that thing was off. We used to go to the show or had movies, had American movies.

JR: Yeah.

SO: Yeah. Or hear the radio or play the music. Somebody get in the room, teaches you ukulele [*ukulele*], guitar. You try stay, but you don't practice yourself so you forget. 'Cause just you want to kill time, that's all. After that, what? After that I went into the service. October 1945 I was inducted. Go Schofield [Barracks], but they sent us back. "You are essential worker, go back to work."

JR: Oh yeah. This is even after the war?

SO: Yeah, 1945, October.

JR: You were still essential?

SO: Yeah, still essential. January 2, 1946, they told us to report back to Schofield for induction.

JR: I thought you mentioned something, that after the Punahou you went to some other place?

SO: Well, Punahou, we stayed, what, one year. That was what, 1944, '45. Yeah, about December '44. Forty-three I got out [of vocational school], so early part of '44 I came out. So December 1944, I think, I went to Mill Forty-Three, School [Street] and Kalihi Street. Transferred that thing, so I can learn little bit more construction. In the shop, but this I can go out on the field, repair heavy equipment, like the bulldozer and the tractors, yeah, and the carry-alls and whatnot, crane. And then that building, how to make the building—put up small building or what. I went to Mill Forty-Three.

JR: You could put in for a transfer like that?

SO: Yeah. I asked if you get certain kind of training. You know the apprentice program? Oh, I asked the apprentice superintendent if he had any. I still was not journeyman yet, so I need certain hours, yeah, for the 4,000 hours. He went to find out. About two weeks later he say, "Certain place get whatever you want." So I asked for transfer. The superintendent didn't want me to go but. (Chuckles)

JR: He liked you.

SO: Well, you know, when you work, you work. And time for play, play. But I always report to work. If I sick, I come to work and then report to him. "What doctor should I go?" And then if he knows that I'm sick, then he help me what doctor to go.

JR: Oh yeah?

- SO: Yeah. That was good, 'cause I don't have no doctor 'cause I came from the [Big] Island. So he helped me out. That was good. Stayed over there until 1945.
- JR: Yeah. That was Mill. . . .
- SO: Mill Forty-Three.
- JR: So what was that? Mill Forty-Three, was that a building or what?
- SO: Yeah, wooden building, wooden building. They had Mill Forty-One, Mill Forty-Three, and certain other mill over there. So get one carpenter shop, one sheet metal shop. Certain place they had, too. Farrington High School was the motor pool.
- JR: For. . . .
- SO: For all the USED trucks, buses, whatever heavy equipment they have.
- JR: Was the school there at the time?
- SO: Yeah. They had too, but afterwards I think the thing came the Joseph Farrington [High School] building. I think after war, after '46. I'm not sure. After I went army. (Chuckles) After that I reported to Schofield and stayed there for, what, month and a half. And then I come to Punchbowl, where that Roosevelt [High School] was. No, what elementary school is that?
- JR: Stevenson?
- SO: Stevenson?
- JR: No, that's the intermediate I think.
- SO: Elementary school on Nehoa Street going down, Stevenson?
- JR: Yeah, that might be the intermediate.
- SO: Intermediate?
- JR: I'm not sure, cannot remember.
- SO: Up side is . . .
- JR: Lincoln.
- SO: Lincoln School. But this is below, on Nehoa Street side. Got another school, must be Stevenson [Intermediate School].
- JR: Yeah, I think so.

SO: Right over there had army camp. That's where we stayed over there, Punchbowl. From there we reported to Fort Armstrong. And then we went to work at Base Yard Six. We had another military base over there all taking care of equipments.

JR: Now, where was that?

SO: Base Yard Six? That's 'Iolani. That's where the 100th [Infantry] Battalion office was. 'Iolani School had. Someplace around like that.

JR: You mentioned that you went to Schofield for one-and-half months.

SO: Oh, training. You know, when you're inducted, you got to get basic training, so month and a half.

JR: How did you feel about . . .

SO: Basic training?

JR: No, about getting inducted.

SO: Oh, inducted. Well, might as well. You figure, you have to get in because all the other person all volunteered, yeah, for 100th Infantry [Battalion] and later on 442nd [Regimental Combat Team], so something like that. All the family got in. I was the last person.

JR: Oh yeah? So your brothers were in. . . .

SO: All, all went inside. So my mother supposed to get (seven) stars, but she didn't receive anything. But I told her, "That's all right, don't worry about those things. All your sons came back healthy."

JR: Yeah. Some of your brothers were in the 100th?

SO: No, all in engineers section. One was supposed to ship out in New York, to go to France or Italy. But he got sick, so they held him back. I don't know if he went Fort Ord or what, certain places. The brother above me and myself was engineers. And the older brother, he stayed at Pauoa Valley. (Two other brothers were in the Korean War.) You know, where some people—the farmers—got to move out? They make camp over there too. So after that, I think, then we move Punchbowl. But we stayed Pauoa Valley.

JR: Yeah?

SO: Yeah. (Chuckles) Nice place, cool, near town. Work Fort Armstrong. All right, it's all right.

JR: What was at Punchbowl? What did you guys have at Punchbowl? You went through basic training at Schofield.

SO: Yeah.

JR: Then you came . . .

SO: Then we came to Pauoa Valley in 1946. Then they dismantled.

JR: That was work you were doing there? Training or what?

SO: No, we was PFC [private first class], basic training, you know. After six months, you get T5 for two and one. T, that mean technician. So, then we went to Punchbowl. They dismantle that thing over there. They give back the land or something.

JR: Oh yeah?

SO: Yeah. So they *wen* move to Punchbowl. Then after that they closed our base—Base Yard Six or something like that, or Fort Armstrong. They didn't close Fort Armstrong, but we had to move to Schofield. So Schofield, that was what, December. November or December too, I think. That's 1946. Yeah, 1946 I was shipped to Christmas Island.

JR: To do what?

SO: Christmas Island got heavy equipment operator, plus repair. Welding and whatnot, yeah.

JR: So it's the first time you went out of the islands?

SO: Yeah, that's the first time I went to the different islands. Lot of lobsters, lot of fish.

(Laughter)

JR: Oh yeah?

SO: Yeah, so you just got to watch the tide. The first time, this is how you catch the lobsters. Go the back way, somebody going shine the flashlight so the eyes shine, he's blinded. He or she blinded, so you go in the back and just press it down on the rock, so you can grab.

JR: And then you grab the tail?

SO: No, you hold it down. When you grab, you press it down so she won't move. She going try flap her tail, yeah, and run away.

JR: And then what?

SO: Then you can grab it out and put it in the bag.

JR: You learned that down there?

SO: Yeah. And I get frightened from moving. But after that you get all right. So somebody making hot water. You know that oil can? Wash it out, boiling can. So when we bring that, just dump the lobster inside.

JR: Sounds pretty good.

SO: Oh yeah, we had lobster omelette for breakfast. You just camp. We had to work Wednesday and Saturday half a day, because if you work five days and get two days off, then maybe you go bug, so commander say half a day, half a day. You get ration. We don't eat at the mess hall. But they give us so much ration so we can go out camp, stay out. You know, like Sunday, Saturday night we stay out.

JR: How long were you down there?

SO: Just about three-and-a-half months. April we came back. We got discharged.

JR: What were you doing there for three-and-a-half months?

SO: Well, repair. Like I said, repair and then heavy equipment operator. You get graders, rollers, and they fix the air field, patch up. Or we got to put lining inside, so got to dig hole. If broken down, we got to repair that thing by welding. But mechanics, mechanics is somebody else.

JR: What kind of a difference was there between doing that kind of work as a civilian and then doing it as a soldier?

SO: Well, at least you get experience as a journeyman. Whereas, if you were working as a civilian, you wouldn't come to that much experience certain things. So that was good experience for me, for repair that. I had some kind of idea where that thing was while I was working over here. So good thing I had little bit experience. Not that much, but you know had. So when you went over there, repair work was all done. And get desalination [i.e., desalinization facilities].

JR: Oh, for the water.

SO: They had brackish water, so they pump it up and we make fresh water. Not that good, but still good enough.

JR: Did you ever think of making a career out of the military, you know, being an engineer in the military?

SO: Yeah, but gee, I didn't think about it. Because they said, "You folks ready for discharge." We get memo from the headquarters, you know. We get all the names come out, time for leave, what day for leave. Everybody get certain day for leave. Spent Christmas and New Year at Christmas Island. Same like any place else.

JR: No Christmas tree probably though.

SO: Well, only thing, how we dry the fish. We used to dry the fish and mail it home.

JR: From there?

SO: From the islands, you know. We get *ulua* and get shark too, cut 'em up and dry 'em up so you cannot tell the difference. When you look at it, maybe you cannot tell *ulua* and shark. But after you start eating, maybe you can tell the different taste. Salty, but, you know, we make 'em salty already.

JR: Did you do much fishing when you were living as a kid on the Big Island.

SO: No, after that, no. Only over there.

JR: But when you were a kid?

SO: No, no more chance to go. We had to go to the river when we had to go hook that '*o'opu*. I don't know what the American name for that. We used to make money, so we used to sell that thing to the Filipinos like that. Sometimes you get the big ones, small ones. Used to make some extra money for soda or candy. Five cents, ten cents they give us.

JR: What was going on during the war for your folks? I mean, your dad was working on the plantation and your mother had that store. How was their lives affected by what was going on, you know, the war? Was it affected in any way?

SO: Well, you see, we cannot go out. That's all. During the night, not free at the night. I don't know if we had air raid practice or the siren ring at eight o'clock or what, but the night warden used to come around check the lights. Get leak or something like that, cover 'em up or something. That's about all. No movies, no nothing. Just got to stand by or read book. That's all. You got to cover yourself so the light cannot go.

JR: With a blanket or something?

SO: Blanket or something, cover up the window. Make it lightproof or something.

JR: Did your father stay with the plantation for his whole life?

SO: Yeah, whole life. He got retired. He retired from the plantation.

JR: What about your mother and her store?

SO: Well, after that, you figure all the family left already, nobody home for them, so might as well give it to the plantation and come back. They came out. They came out, I think, in the fifties or . . .

JR: Came Honolulu?

SO: Came Honolulu '54. I'm not sure. I forgot what the date. They came out though.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

JR: You know, I wanted to ask you, do you remember what you were getting paid for these different jobs when you started working? Say, at Punahou School, what you were getting

paid?

SO: Punahou School, yeah. I get paid---apprentice program was what, fifty-five cents, maybe less than that. Was thirty-five cents or what?

JR: An hour?

SO: Per hour. And then that thing came up about sixty cents. Then so much hours you have to put inside, then you get automatic. If you put in so much hours or so many months, you automatic get paid extra.

JR: Oh, get a raise.

SO: Yeah, and that thing is set already, until you get journeyman's rating. So you have your hours and the papers come in from apprentice program.

JR: Was that good pay back then?

SO: Yeah. Dollar fifty-five cents, that's pretty good.

JR: But even when you started, the fifty-five cents, was that good pay for a guy your age at that time?

SO: Well, I guess so. Without trade maybe it's all right, I guess. Well, anything you got to start from the bottom. In the long run, you got to reach over there. So I figure, start from the bottom, always start from the bottom, work yourself a way to the top. That's all. I was the first---my other buddy, other welder, different department or different section, you call that, but still was USED, we was the first persons. Two of us, we got our apprenticeship, we made journeyman rating. That's when you seen that paper from . . .

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I saw your picture in the . . .

SO: . . . Honolulu Vocational School. That's when they took our picture.

JR: I don't remember what year that was.

SO: That was 1945. Then in '46, I went in the army already.

JR: Did the army pay you more or less?

SO: Oh, less. (Chuckles) It was twenty-one dollars.

JR: A month?

SO: Month.

JR: But they gave you housing and . . .

SO: Well, barracks. We can sleep. That's all.

JR: Food.

SO: Mm hmm [yes]. Food, medical, clothing. That's all.

JR: When you were working for the USED, did it seem like you had enough money to, you know, make ends meet?

SO: Oh yeah. Beginning maybe not—it didn't bring enough money or what—but you can manage.

JR: Whereabouts were you living? You mentioned the Nakamura Hotel. Did you stay there for the whole time?

SO: No, no. Well, my father's friend had in Lusitana Street. He was a barber. So, I stayed in the back. They had another extra room. So I slept over there for about a month and a half.

JR: Then you went . . .

SO: Then I went to Nakamura Hotel.

JR: But then after Nakamura?

SO: Then after Nakamura Hotel, that's when I went to the service. Forty-four, I don't know if. . . . I went in for interview, I stayed about four hours on the grass of apprentice program.

JR: Interview?

SO: Interview.

JR: Oh, when you first came.

SO: When I first came [to Honolulu].

JR: What was that like?

SO: Well, if I went home again, I have to come back next year. He might come back anytime, so I just hang around. But took me about four hours just for wait for interview. (Chuckles)

JR: What kind of interview was that?

SO: Apprentice program. Yeah, that's the welding program. The secretary or the clerk said, "Oh, this man waited for you more than four hours."

JR: Good for you! And then he just asked you questions or something?

SO: Yeah, if you get any kind experience. "I went to Hilo Vocational School," I tell him.

"Okay," he said. "You got to go get physical and whatnot." They tell you report certain day in the morning. So we start working. You buy certain tool. Every payday you buy so much tools and so much tools.

JR: Your own tools?

SO: Your own tools. You got to buy your own tools.

JR: Did you buy them from a store somewhere or did you buy them from the military or what?

SO: No, you got to go Gaspro, or get three different store I think. You got to catch the bus and you got to go. (Chuckles) Well, main thing was the ruler. One ruler I had.

JR: Tape kind?

SO: Tape rule, so you can measure.

JR: What was it like coming from the Big Island to Honolulu at that time?

SO: Well, get more people. More people and you get more places to go or more places to see, yeah. Whereas in Big Island, everything you got to go with bus or car or bicycle. (Chuckles) Yeah, you know, that's why.

JR: How did you like the difference?

SO: Well, get more people and more things to see and more things to eat. It was a little better I guess. As the years went by, I guess war break off, you know, peace. Where was that? Where I was working now?

JR: Was that Mill Forty-Three?

SO: No. After that I went service, that's why.

JR: Yeah, but when the war ended, that was . . .

SO: The war ended 1945, but where I was working '45? No, but they didn't say nothing. They didn't get nothing on that thing. Oh, that was Korean War. Korean War was half a day.

JR: But when the VJ Day—that's the day the war ended, VJ Day.

SO: V Day. Yeah, well. . . .

JR: That was the day that, you know, the war was *pau* here.

SO: Yeah, but they still kept us. They still kept us until 1946, yeah. So after that was now March and the memo came out, so certain names report back to Schofield. We all got discharged from there. And we look for outside job.

JR: What did you find?

SO: I found Continental Trailer, that's all in welding. Make trailers over there for troop carriers, the long troop carriers.

JR: Like a truck.

SO: Yeah. At the Ala Moana---what is that thing now? What they have now right across Pier Four? Right across Pier Four I think was, Pier Four or Pier Five. What they have? Oh, that's the federal building there now.

JR: That was where the place was that you were working?

SO: Yeah, the Continental Trailer.

JR: Was it hard to find a job coming out of the army?

SO: Yeah, I guess so. Kind of hard. I found that, so I worked two years and then they lay you off. And then I went to work for Home Welding Company. We used to make flatbeds, for Aloha Motors, like that. You know, when the truck come with the chassis only, we used to make flatbed they can load, and other small repair work like that. So work over there for two years again and then went to work for Hickam Air Force Base.

JR: Hickam?

SO: Hickam Air Force Base. Civil service work over there. So I stayed there until 1973. Nineteen seventy-three, from 1950.

JR: What kind of stuff were you doing over there?

SO: Repair, fabrication. If cannot repair, make new one, fabricate new one. So we replaced it. It's beyond repair, so you know we have to make new one. And if it can be repaired, well, cut out the old one and make new section, that's all. And whatever welding things you supposed to do over there---storage tank, repair storage tank, aviation line, gas line. I got burned. Burned my hair up here. Stayed in the hospital about one week, I think---Tripler [Army Hospital]. Then recuperate at home another thirty days, I think. Then went back to work again. Everything came out all right. Previous to that, I injured my back, but that thing kept up. But in 1973---let's see, Korean War *pau* then. The government didn't have enough money or something, so they start laying off. Or those who want to get out, get out. So they told me, "We give you disability if you want to go out."

"All right."

JR: So you took that.

SO: I took that, so I got out. And then 1973, I went Honolulu Community College after that for take OSHA, Occupational Safety [and] Health. I thought I can be an inspector or something. But there's no job in that field.

JR: When you finished.

SO: When finish, yeah. So I applied for Sheraton-Waikīkī [Hotel] as a maintenance mechanic. I got hired 1980. So 1981, I went back to Honolulu Community College, took refrigeration, air condition. Good thing I knew the assistant instructor. If not, I couldn't get in.

JR: So you were taking classes and working at the same time?

SO: Yeah, because I'm swing shift. My hours was three to eleven P.M. My day off was Thursday, Friday.

JR: Okay.

SO: I feel if I going to stay and work at the hotel, got to check the refrigerator, laundry machine, the air conditioner. Might as well I go try school, because the hours, I [don't] have to report till three o'clock. I went to inquire, so they start from eight to twelve—eight to four supposed to be, but seven to twelve was for beginner, first semester. And the second semester was twelve to four. So, maybe I can make 'em, so I applied. I applied that thing and I stayed back all through the [registration]. So they had thirty-seven student, that's over [the limit] already, see. But the instructor, chief inspector, say, "Take one more." So I'm the thirty-eight or thirty-ninth student. So I got in. If not, cannot go in.

JR: Why did you want to go back and learn another thing, that refrigeration?

SO: Well, I figure if I know—I would get refrigerator at home, okay. Now, if something wrong, I used to call somebody else to pay [to repair] that laundry machine. So if I know certain circuit or certain things, how they go by, then I can do that myself. What's wrong, maybe I figure, learn one other trade. I got a degree on that, AS [associate in science] degree. Another two years I spend over there. So occupational safety had two years. They teach you how to investigate. Not too bad. So I got my AS degree. I got two AS, just like I went college four years.

JR: Yeah, two and two is four. (Laughs)

SO: Yeah, two and two four. But gee, what I going major, even if I went to university like that?

JR: Had you ever thought about when you were younger, you know, going to college?

SO: Yeah, going to college. But see, if got a family or what, kind of hard, thinking of going college like that. Too bad I didn't think that thing earlier.

JR: Yeah, but when you were—before you went to apprentice, vocational school, had you thought about going to college or anything like that?

SO: Yeah, you thought of that, but you figure, oh, maybe not enough comprehension to absorb that textbook. Not like high school or what, 'eh? You got to read and then take notes, what the instructor says, you know. This is the hard part I get. I got to go ask my instructor every time . . .

JR: Afterwards or something?

SO: Yeah, wow. "How you try explain this thing, this sections, this sections?" I get more knowledge from that if I don't understand. It's just like certain subject, you know, at school. At the community college, you had to acquire certain subject, yeah, for get the degree, so you got to ask the instructor. You got to go back, "You get time for me? Could you explain for me little bit more?" See, I'm hard for comprehend. That's all.

But at least I put in my ten years, ten-and-a-half years, for Sheraton—or the union, Local Five—so I vested now. So now, you can get pension, small pension but. Now any Sheraton hotel, I can go, I can put in to stay for two nights, any Sheraton hotel.

JR: Oh yeah?

SO: Yeah.

JR: Is that free?

SO: Yeah, if they have. If not full house.

JR: Yeah. If they got space.

SO: Yeah, if they get space. If not, 50 percent.

JR: Oh, pretty good deal.

SO: Good deal. I put my ten-and-a-half years, so that's good, no?

JR: So you fully retired now? You don't have regular jobs?

SO: I try help the church out.

JR: What church?

SO: The Tenrikyo [Kalihi] Church, my church. Go clean the yard or. . . . That's right about Roosevelt High School, you know, Mott-Smith Drive. Well, we cannot say it's a church because we don't have square area. You have to get 21,000 square feet or something, plus parking and whatnot. Yeah, so we don't have one.

JR: So what is it right now?

SO: It's a home, private home. So my reverend is engineer too. And the wife is a schoolteacher too. But they have to become reverend. Our headquarters is Nu'uaniu, yeah, 2920 [Pali Highway]. Tenrikyo [Hawai'i] Dendocho, something like that. Right next to nursing home, right about there. Get lots of repair work, so free labor you have to give. Well, any department you got to go, any church you go, you won't get paid anyway. They feed you lunch or something like that. That's about all. But in the long run, you help. The more you help, you get help plus benefit later on. You put money in the bank, you get dividend. Like

this, if you give free service, you get dividend different way. That's why I'm trying. I try help people. If they want to donate, donate. If they want to pay you for service—well, if I go repair refrigerator or laundry machine, I ask 'em for parts only. "Whatever the parts, you pay for it. Then if you want to give me for beer money for my service, gasoline money, that's up to you."

JR: That's pretty generous.

SO: Well, that's up to the person.

JR: Yeah.

SO: Yeah, so I won't try be greedy, show no greed. Greed is one of the mental thoughts we have. I try. Well, anything else you get?

JR: I just wanted to---you're married, yeah?

SO: Oh yeah, yeah.

JR: And what year did you get married?

SO: Well, see kind of long, kind of long, yeah? Nineteen seventy-five. So we didn't get child until 1979. So Lisa is now thirteen years old. She's in the seventh grade now. Well, other than that, nothing more else to add, 'eh?

JR: Well, it was really nice talking to you. You know, I appreciate your help for the project. Thank you.

SO: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

AN ERA OF CHANGE

Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawai'i

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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